

Beautiful Ape Girl Baby

Heather Fowler

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A unique blend of chutzpah and vulnerability mark this story of a girl born with the looks of an ape.

Irreverent, unconventional, and hyperreal, *Beautiful Ape Girl Baby* tracks an ape born to wealthy parents. Heather Fowler's dark, humorous novel is both the story of a psychological experiment gone wrong and an aching portrayal of a seventeen-year-old in search of love.

Born with the looks and violence of a primate, Beautiful is raised on a compound that includes friends who are paid to praise her, designer clothes, and a mother and father who shield her with elaborate lies. No one dares risk her displeasure, so when she escapes on a road trip to meet her idol—radio host of the Strong as Animal Woman Show—it's with the reckless confidence born of having never been held responsible for her impulsive behavior. Beautiful's instincts cause mayhem, while her genuine belief in her own superiority colors her perspective.

With a complex character who casually quotes Audre Lorde, believes in the Russian expression *toska*, and spouts wisdom as only an outsider can, Beautiful is a strange figure. She's a bibliophile loaded with insights, yet naive. She's childish, awkward, unintentionally funny, honest, and despite her extremes, occasionally a normal, hormonal teen. The unique blend of chutzpah and vulnerability turns a wild premise into a moving tale of learning to live in the world.

Beneath the series of accidents and chance encounters lies a deeper tale of self-image and loneliness, choosing to stand out or blend in, and the power of nature versus nurture. Accompanied by her driver, Thomas, Beautiful meets people on the fringes, from an eccentric forty-nine-year old gangster dubbed Fedora Man to a drug-addicted, would-be thief. In one of the book's smartest convolutions, Beautiful, who has undergone years of therapy herself, plays counselor to the adults she meets, with surprisingly persuasive powers.

Fowler spins classic themes of loyalty, betrayal, love, and protection in a dynamic plot. Beautiful's gradual awakening to the truth about herself raises provocative questions on what it means to be animal or human.

KAREN RIGBY (Summer 2016)

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